

The Fall 226

Chapter 226: Alliances

"I send greetings from Nonet of Hive Kundevi," Zac said. "The Anointed heard of me attending this hunt and lent me these two treasures."

"For what purpose?" the Anointed simply said.

"The Dominators," Zac said, making the Anointed immediately tense up.

"What about them?"

"We believe them to be the largest threat to our survival, but we haven't heard anything about them since our worlds got merged. We seek both allies and information," Zac explained.

"Why is Nonet not representing itself for these matters? This is highly irregular, even if you were Zhix," the Anointed said as it ripped off a large piece of the meat.

"Strength above all," Zac simply said. "I am stronger than Nonet, much like I am stronger than most of the Anointed. I have earned the right to represent Hive Kundevi. My name is Zachary Atwood, and I am currently placed highest on the power ladder among us humans."

The enormous Zhix leader gave a start when he realized who Zac was, and looked it Zac over once again.

"It is true, strength above all. I am Herat, eighth Anointed of Hive Urbot. Almost getting knocked unconscious by the strongest is not a dishonor," the large Zhix said, even looking a bit pleased. "What do you wish to know?"

"The Dominators such as Inevitability and Void's Disciple are likely the strongest beings on our planets, yet us humans haven't heard anything of them fighting the foreign invaders who threaten Zhix and Humans alike," Zac began. "We worry about what they are planning instead. They tried to enslave all Zhix before from what I understand, and we believe they might try something similar again."

Herat slowly tapped a large finger on the table for a few seconds before it sighed, seemingly having come to a decision.

"They are gathering our kind," it began. "Our ancestors died by the millions to stop their expansion thousands of years ago, but their sacrifice is becoming forgotten. One hive after another has aligned with the Dominators."

"Why?" Zac couldn't help ask with a frown.

"The corruption is everywhere. Both you and I reek of it, and that one behind you does as well. If all is corrupted, nothing is. This Cosmic Power enables us to evolve our hives and ascend. Some voices have started questioning our attempts to exterminate the Dominators back then, saying we shunned the gift of the universe" Herat explained.

"The lure of power is right in front of them, but the tales of enslavement are distant. They willingly follow to learn the secrets of power from the Dominators, in turn giving up their freedom," Herat said with some hopelessness.

“What about the hives who don’t follow?” Zac asked.

“For now we are being ignored, but we know that is just temporary. We worry just like you what they are planning, and seep ourselves in corruption to stand ready when the fight comes,” Herat said.

Zac frowned. He had held some small hope that the Dominators didn’t care about the state of the planet since they simply were more interested in cultivating. They had stayed their whole life on a planet with barely any Cosmic Energy at all, but now had almost endless resources to keep improving. That might make them forget about domination, and instead focus on pushing toward D-Grade and increased longevity.

But it was clear that they hadn’t changed their ways and were already starting to amass the Zhix, and it was understandable that some chose to follow them. Their core belief was centered around rooting out Corruption, but when everything was corrupted they needed to make huge changes.

“I understand. My force and a few others are preparing for that battle as well. You understand them better than we do, and I think we should work together, just like how your hives banded together against the Dominators all that time ago,” Zac said.

“I cannot make that decision, human. Your strength is great, but you still are not Zhix. But I will relay your message to the leaders of our war council. They will contact you about their decision,” the Zhix said as it got to its feet. “Now I must go hunt. Strength to your hive.”

“Wait, how will we get in contact?” Zac said with confusion. “If we ally right now we will be able to stay in touch through the System.”

He lived on an isolated island, and he was afraid he’d lose contact with them if he let Herat go. It might end up like the same as with Billyville, where they were technically allies but unable to contact each other until they met up in person again.

“I am just the Eighth Anointed, I cannot enter such a pact. A few of the High Anointed have miraculous means to communicate great distances, but if we cannot reach you that is also fate,” Herat said as it lumbered away. “Do not worry, the Zhix always keep their word. Also, avoid the Dominators for now. You are strong, but they are stronger.”

Zac frowned at that last remark. This Herat wasn’t telling him everything, but then again he didn’t expect it to. At least it seemed he had achieved one of his goals for now, which was to open up channels with the Zhix on the mainland.

As for these magical abilities, he could only hope they would work. Otherwise, he’d have to visit a hive personally in the future. He was hoping that he’d meet a few more powerful people during the hunt, setting up his private network, and if that worked out it shouldn’t be too troublesome to find one of the larger hives.

“What are you planning?” Thea suddenly asked as she sat down at the same spot where Herat sat before.

“After this hunt, I will start closing Incursions in earnest,” Zac said. “I believe very few of them can match my power at the moment.”

Thea snorted at the somewhat boastful comment, but she didn't contradict him. And what he said was true. Abby already told him right at the beginning of the integration that one person snatching pretty much all the good titles in the start was extremely rare.

And from there he had kept accumulating one advantage after another that put him far above what was expected of a newly integrated world. And with how strength worked there was limited use of large numbers in trying to stop people such as himself, so unless the invaders had leaders who could match him they were in trouble.

But then again, that simple fact worked the other way around as well. The existence of beings even stronger than any humans on earth was a huge potential risk, since if Zac wasn't able to handle them, perhaps no one could. That was one reason he wanted to find the methods for the War Arrays the Medhin used but he, unfortunately, couldn't find anything of the kind after rummaging through the possessions of Tyrbat.

"But I believe the Dominators are the real threat, apart from the few top tier Incursions like the Undead Empire. I'm not sure you've met other Anointed apart from this one, but they are extremely strong even without levels or titles."

"The Marshall Clan is situated somewhat close to a large hive. But we haven't made any headway with them. After a few intense battles we have formed some sort of unspoken truce where we stay at our own land," Thea said. "But one of these giants never emerged during the battles."

"The Anointed are both their spiritual and actual leaders. I still don't know if they're another species or some equivalent of a queen ant, but they are far stronger than the normal ones," Zac said. "I am trying to forge an alliance with the Zhix to prepare ourselves for the clash with the Dominators. It doesn't seem they are content to stay hidden forever if they are amassing forces."

"Since we're on the subject we should discuss a few other things," Thea said with some reluctance. "You've already spoken with my grandfather before about an alliance. It has already been formed, and we have been looking for you to join it."

"Oh?" Zac only said.

"Since you're planning on closing the Incursions anyway, you should join us. Indeed, we do not possess your raw power, at the moment at least. But I believe you lack a proper support system for things such as information gathering and logistics," Thea pushed, obviously uncomfortable with presenting a sales pitch.

She had likely been urged by her grandpa to seek allies during the hunt, but Zac had learned the past day she might be even more introvert than himself. His mouth couldn't help curve upward at seeing her forcing herself to advertise the alliance, and Thea immediately caught on to his glee.

She immediately closed her mouth and shot him a glare.

"What's so funny?" she spat out.

"Nothing, nothing," Zac laughed as he sent her a prompt for becoming an ally, finally connecting Port Atwood and the Marshall Clan.

Since they had dealt with the Zhix the two kept going toward their mountain, and the evening was pretty uneventful. One thing that was worth noting was that Salvation was kicked off from the top position after a couple of hours, the two Dominators once again passing him or her.

Salvation seemed to have gained a good boost that was somewhat unique to himself during the night, but he couldn't keep up with the carnage of the two E-Graded monsters during the day. That hopefully proved that he wasn't as strong as Zac just yet.

Night soon came and the two decided to stay by the foot of a mountain, hiding in a small courtyard of what should have once been a disciple's cultivation cave. They vigilantly looked into the darkness, but this night they didn't sense the insidious oppression from yesterday, which was a huge relief.

Around three a.m. they could pretty much confirm that the darkness wouldn't descend today and were finally able to somewhat relax. They still decided to stay for the night though, and only resumed their journey in the morning.

It was only two days later that the Darkness once again descended, but its arrival proved that it wasn't a one-time thing. Zac and Thea were barely attacked this time, though their minds were still a bit scrambled by the penetrating wail that seemed to spread through the whole zone.

The trick of staying at the foot of the mountain was extremely effective, and it seemed that most people still around had learned their lesson since only roughly 800 people left the trial during the night.

It was nothing compared to what happened the day before. It was the Arena battle. In just an hour over four thousand names were removed from the ladder, proving that there were quite a few who had tried to stay under the radar as they searched for treasure.

Neither Thea nor Zac were called of course, since both had both battled and killed a fair amount since the start. Zac also breathed out in relief when he saw that Salvation didn't gain any levels this time, meaning that it might have been a one-time event that happened during the last darkness.

The hunt was starting to become a routine as the two went from mountain to mountain, cleaning the summits from all its valuables. Thea had fully healed after three days thanks to the ginseng and her healing pills, but they chose to stay together both for safety and company.

There were a lot of things in Zac's pouch by now that he couldn't understand, but excluding these odd treasures he estimated his gain to be well over a hundred million Nexus Coins. Thea's gain wasn't small either, and she was currently in the fourth position.

Zac himself lost the lead of the Gatherer ladder after the second day, getting surpassed by Emperor Nenotheop. Thea had a theory that the emperor utilized his large army to gather treasure from multiple mountains simultaneously, and Zac wouldn't be surprised if that was the case.

The two could only increase their efforts, and every night they only slept for around an hour, and after a week of hunting, it was starting to take its toll. However, something odd changed the normal flow of the hunt, as they saw a group of three humans and two Ishiate desperately fleeing down the mountains.

And right on their heels was what at first glance looked like very life-like robots.